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ABSTRACT

A study of student leadership experiences at three women's colleges is described, and its implications for leadership in coeducational settings are examined. A brief review of research on women and leadership in college looks at women students' under representation in leadership roles, some reasons for this situation, female students' self esteem, and the institutional climate for women. The present study investigated how women students in single-sex colleges lead, how they learn to lead, how they described their leadership experiences, environmental factors, and how conditions supporting women's leadership can be fostered in coeducational colleges and universities. The three colleges studied were Wellesley College (Massachusetts), Randolph-Macon Woman's College (Virginia), and Westhampton College (Virginia). Data were gathered in individual and group interviews with students, faculty, administrators, and alumnae, through observation on campus, and document analysis. Results suggest that despite the potential benefits of programs, organizations, and activities for women's leadership development, a number of obstacles exist, including: growing separatism and fragmentation in university communities; questions about balancing women's needs for separate development with needs for group participation; diminishing resources; and lack of commitment. (Contains 78 references.) (MSE)

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"I Can Be Anything!": Student Leadership in Three Women's Colleges

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Pittsburgh, PA.

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Pittsburgh Hilton and Towers, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 4-7, 1993. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

"I've gained a lot of self-confidence from being in leadership positions. I've done things I never thought I could do. I've become more outspoken. I have to talk and think on my feet, and make decisions and be available to other students." (senior, Randolph-Macon Woman's College)

Introduction

Increasing numbers of undergraduate women on college campuses and increasing numbers of women in the work force compel us to consider the extent to which women students' needs for leadership development are being met (Sagaria, 1988). If it is the case that "[i]nstitutions of higher education must systematically educate women for leadership in society" (Sagaria, 1988, p. 6), we need more information about what that "systematic education" should include, how that education can be made broadly available and accessible to women students, and what current obstacles exist to women's leadership development on our campuses.

Women's colleges have been described as "models of what institutions dedicated to women can mean" (Smith, 1989, p. 50) and, as such, might provide examples of approaches to leadership development beneficial to women students. The study on which this paper is based was conducted to examine and understand the nature of, and student experiences within, selected women's colleges, and to determine what, if anything, women's colleges might "say" to coeducational institutions about women's education.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (a) to describe the results of research on the leadership experiences of college women in three women's colleges, and (b) to describe the implications of that

research for women students in coeducational settings. After a brief overview of research on women and leadership in general and in college, results of the study and its implications are described.

Research on Women and Leadership

Recent research about women and women college students provides information important to assessing and creating campus environments supportive of women, including the development of women's leadership potential. During the past 15 years, a growing body of research on women has challenged previous assumptions about human development, provided information and insights about women's lives, and created new theories of women's development that have implications for colleges and universities (c.f., Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1990; Josselson, 1987; Komarovsky, 1985; Miller, 1986; Straub, 1987). For example, the work of several of the authors mentioned identified elements essential to women's cognitive and psychosocial development. The elements included affirmation of the role of relationships and caring in women's development of identity and support for feelings, personal experience, and collaboration--as well as critical thinking, objectivity, and independence--as aspects of learning and intellectual development. In this section, research on women's leadership, women as students, and single sex settings for leadership development is summarized.

Women and Leadership

Included in the expanding understanding of women's lives and experiences are new knowledge about, and new paradigms for, women's leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991; Rogers, 1988). Studies of women in leadership positions in business (c.f., Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990), government (c.f., Cantor & Bernay, 1992), and education (c.f., Astin & Leland, 1991; DesJardins, 1989; Sagaria, 1988) have elicited "feminine principles" of leadership (Helgesen, 1990, p. 5), including an emphasis on process and relationships, decisions involving all members of the organization, a nurturing and caring approach to leading, and "making intuitive decisions and not getting hung up on hierarchy" (Helgesen, 1990, p. 5).

Rosener's (1990) study of women leaders identified what she called "interactive leadership," (p. 120) in which "women encourage participation, share power and information, enhance other people's self-worth, and get others excited about their work" (p. 120). Other descriptions of women as leaders, variously referred to as "feminine leadership" (Rogers, 1988), "generative leadership" (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988), and "managing in the feminine context" (Cohen, 1989) offer similar descriptions of "women's ways of leadership" (Helgesen, 1990): mutual empowerment between followers and leaders, an emphasis on collaboration to achieve goals, commitment to promoting self-esteem among all participants, and "values of duty, love, and care" (Rogers, 1988, p. 3). Such descriptions clearly reflect and support the important roles of relationships, connections, and affiliation in

young women's cognitive and psychosocial development (Gilligan, 1990; Josselson, 1987).

Other authors note that such approaches to leadership are not characteristic of women only, but, rather, of effective leaders, be they female or male (Kanter, 1977; Powell, 1988). Rost (1991), for example, developed "a postindustrial definition of leadership" (p. 101) that included "a communal relationship" (p. 111) among leaders and followers with common purposes and shared responsibility to achieve those purposes. Rogers (1988) posited, however, that the new ways of defining leadership reflect emerging acceptance of behavior and values long used by women in their personal and work lives, but also long devalued as "soft" and "feminine," and therefore inappropriate to leading complex organizations in competitive arenas (Cantor & Bernay, 1992).

Women and Leadership in College

Research on the impact of college on students has demonstrated the importance of out-of-class activities to achieving the educational purposes of higher education (Astin, 1977; Astin, 1993; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Leadership experiences, for example, have been shown to contribute in significant ways to students' growth and development in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh, 1992). Involvement in leadership activities is associated with gains in practical and interpersonal competence (Kuh, 1993), development of leadership skills related to later job success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), intellectual development (Baxter

Magolda, 1992) and development of altruism (Pascarella, Ethington, & Smart, 1988).

For women students, in particular, experience as leaders fosters development of a sense of competence and self-confidence (Astin & Leland, 1991; Guido-DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988; Sagaria, 1988). In a study of self-esteem of college women, Astin and Kent (1983) concluded that their "most important finding" was that "women who have leadership experiences in college develop greater self-esteem" (p. 320) than those who do not.

Leadership experiences in college also influence women's lives after graduation. For example, having positions of leadership in college "increases the likelihood women will enter male-dominated occupations" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 624). In their study of women leaders in government and education, Astin and Leland (1991) found an important relationship between early involvement in leadership and the women's reported self-confidence, self-awareness, and leadership skills. Indeed, "the women leaders persuasively demonstrate the critical significance of experiences that allow leadership practice" (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 55). The early leadership activities cited by the women leaders as particularly valuable included student government, sororities, athletics, and the many leadership experiences available in women's colleges.

Sagaria's (1988) study of women student leaders elicited similar findings. Her respondents stated that leadership responsibilities enhanced their sense of competence and their confidence in their

ability to lead. In discussing the implications of the results of their study, Astin and Kent (1983) asserted "if women are to emerge from college feeling strong, independent, self-assured, and well-prepared to take on whatever future roles they have chosen for themselves . . . they must be given more leadership experiences as undergraduates." (p. 324)

It is the case, however, that although women now constitute more than half of the undergraduate student population at colleges and universities in the United States, women are underrepresented in student leadership positions on most coeducational campuses (Leonard & Sigall, 1989; Sagaria, 1988). The experience of former women's colleges that are now coeducational illustrates some of the difficulties (some of them self-imposed, to be sure) that women students face in seeking and attaining leadership positions in coeducational settings (Lally, 1990). For example, within a short time of becoming coeducational, all Goucher College's top student leader positions were held by men (Lally, 1990).

Reasons posited for the relatively small proportion of women in student leadership roles on coeducational campuses are within and external to women students, including insufficient numbers of female role models in positions of college and university leadership (Keohane, 1984; Leonard & Sigall, 1989); institutional sexism (Sagaria, 1988); student bias against women as candidates for leadership positions (Astin, 1993); women students' lack of self-confidence (Bennett & Shayner, 1988; Keohane, 1984); fear on the part of women students that pursuing leadership might result in loss of

relationships, especially relationships with male peers (Guido DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988); fear of risking non-traditional roles and fear of not being taken seriously as leaders by men (Cantor & Bernay, 1992); and reluctance on the part of women to compete against men for leadership positions (Astin, 1993).

Common threads running through these explanations are stereotypical or traditional expectations of women on the part of female and male students and others in the institution, and structural obstacles in the college environment to challenging and overcoming these expectations. The tendency of colleges and universities to reinforce, rather than counter, gender stereotypes was noted by Astin (1993):

> [W]omen enter college already differing considerably from men in self-rated emotional and psychological health, standardized test scores, GPA's, political attitudes, personality characteristics, and career plans, and most of these differences widen during the undergraduate years. . . [E]ven though men and women are presumably exposed to a common liberal arts curriculum and to other common environmental experiences during the undergraduate years, it would seem that their educational programs preserve and strengthen, rather than reduce or weaken, stereotypical differences between men and women in behavior, personality, aspirations, and achievement. A similar conclusion was reached nearly twenty years ago in Four Critical Years. (p. 405-406)

Other research about the experiences of women students provide additional insights about their "environmental experiences" and the impact of those experiences on learning and development. Studies consistently report the erosion of girls' self-esteem and self-confidence over time from childhood through high school (AAUW, 1992). Unfortunately, their self-esteem and self-confidence do not improve once women become college students. For example, although women are likely to come to college with higher grades than men, they have lower expectations for their performance in college (Hafner, 1989). First-year female students have lower self-confidence than males regarding their abilities in math and public speaking, and general intellectual ability (Hafner, 1989). In fact, women's self-esteem apparently continues to decline during their time in college. In a longitudinal study of high school valedictorians and salutatorians, Arnold and Denny (1985) found the women experienced a "sharp decline" (p. 6) in estimates of their own intelligence in comparison to that of their peers. This lowering of self-estimated intelligence occurred despite continued high levels of academic performance.

The decline in women's self-esteem during the college years has been attributed, in part, to the campus climates women students encounter, as well as to institutional policies and practices regarding women. Hall and Sandler (1984) described a "chilly" (p. 1) college classroom climate, in which men are called on more often than women and men's comments are treated more seriously than those of women. Similar classroom climates have been described by Sadker and

Sadker (1986) and Boyer (1987):

> We were especially struck by the subtle yet significant differences in the way men and women participated in class . . . [I]n many classrooms, women are overshadowed. Even the brightest women often remain silent . . . Not only do men talk more, but what they say often carries more weight. (p. 150)

Hall and Sandler (1984) also identified a chilly out-of-class climate for women, a climate characterized by "micro-inequities" (p. 4), everyday behaviors that discount or ignore someone on the basis of sex, race, or age. Examples included sexist humor, disparagement of women, less time given to women students by faculty and administrators, subtle and overt communication of stereotypical assumptions and expectations about women, and sexual harassment.

Other institutional policies and practices influence the climate for women students (indeed, all women) in colleges and universities (Shavlik, Touchton, & Pearson, 1989). Hierarchical institutional structures and processes (Shavlik et al., 1989); inequity in hiring, promotion, and salary decisions (Chamberlain, 1988; Hensel, 1991); academic cultures and traditions (e.g., in the sciences) that affirm and reinforce "masculine qualities" of objectivity and separate knowing (Fox Keller, 1978); and institutional leadership positions dominated by men demonstrate that women "are outsiders or marginals to the male-dominated world of academe" (Moore, 1987, p. 30).

The gender relations characteristic of college student culture

also affect the experiences of women students (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990). In their study of college student cultures, Holland and Eisenhart (1990) found an emphasis on, and valuing of, romantic relationships between men and women. Within these cultures, men's prestige was determined by their academic, athletic, and other achievements, as well as their attractiveness to women, whereas "the major route to self-worth and prestige" (p. 118) for women was their relationships with men. The researchers also found that the gender relationships present in the peer cultures were maintained in the classroom, and that women students described not being taken seriously as students. Holland and Eisenhart (1990) noted that "not being taken seriously as students has dire consequences for learning." (p. 203)

The college environments encountered by women need not be overtly hostile in order to have a negative impact on women students. For example, Forrest et al. (1984) asserted that the absence of encouragement--a "null environment" (p. 13)--can be as damaging to women students as active discouragement:

> Professionals in higher education do not have to do anything to discourage women since society already does so. Failing to encourage them, however, is to discourage them without even trying. Women enter higher education with a handicap which the null environment does nothing to decrease and may actually reinforce. (p. 13)

The handicap to which Forrest et al. (1984) referred included the internal and external barriers mentioned in the discussion of college

women and leadership: stereotypes about what women can and cannot--and should or should not--do; messages throughout schooling about women's abilities, talents, and achievements; and the self-doubts of the women themselves (Kerr, 1985). Having opportunities available for women to run for leadership positions in coeducational student organizations may be an example of this "null environment"--discouraging by not encouraging--and, therefore, not meeting the needs of women students for leadership experiences and development.

Single-sex Settings for Leadership Development

In contrast to the obstacles women students can encounter in coeducational institutions, examples of encouraging environments for leadership development can be found in single-sex settings. The adult women leaders in the studies by Astin and Leland (1991) and Cantor and Bernay (1992) described the importance of leadership experiences in "all-female settings" (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 56), such as Girl Scouts, sororities, girls' high schools, and women's colleges. Also, Sagaria (1988) found that "the most helpful programs for developing women's leadership seem to be those intended primarily or exclusively for women . . . [because they] focus on supporting and affirming women's identity, aspirations, and accomplishments" (p. 9).

In his longitudinal study of "what matters in college," Astin (1993) concluded that attendance at women's colleges had positive effects on many leadership outcomes, including self-reported growth in public speaking and leadership skills. Indeed, women's colleges "challenge women to become all those things they are not asked to be

in 'coeducational' environments" (Smith, 1989, p. 50), including leaders. Aspects of women's colleges cited as essential to leadership development include recognition and nurturance of individual leadership potential (Bennett & Shayner, 1988), mission statements directed at the development of women (Lundquist & Rice, 1991), being elected to student office (Astin, 1993), and role models of successful women leaders (Chamberlain, 1988; Smith, 1989). Thus, women's colleges "provide an environment in which women are seen as central and in which women are present in diverse roles . . ." (Smith, 1989, p. 49).

Of course, a disadvantage of women's colleges--and other all-female settings for leadership--is that women in such settings do not get experience leading men (Rice, 1990). The leadership achievements of women's college graduates suggest the skills and attitudes developed in women's colleges are transferable to the "real" world of men and women, including male-dominated settings (Tidball, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Smith, 1989). This is a point to which I shall return.

Research Purposes and Methods

The purpose of this study was to extend research on women's colleges by understanding and explaining <u>how</u> women's colleges accomplish their goals of women's education and <u>how</u> they influence their students in positive ways. Research questions that guided the focus on women's leadership were: (1) how do women students lead?, (2) how do the students learn to lead?, (3) how do the students describe

their leadership experiences?, (4) how do the environments in which the women lead, and learn to lead, affect their leadership experiences?, and (5) what are the implications of these students' experiences for coeducational colleges and universities interested in developing leadership opportunities and skills for undergraduate women?

The research methods used in this study were qualitative; that is, the data were words, and they were collected and analyzed by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative methods were selected because they are particularly effective in studying and understanding the processes, cultures, and experiences of people within colleges and universities (Whitt, 1991) and, therefore, are consistent with the purposes of this research.

Qualitative methods also are consistent with the feminist perspectives (Nielson, 1990) that prompted my interest in, and commitment to, identifying ways in which coeducational institutions might become more hospitable educational environments for women. The principles of feminist research that informed this study included a focus on the experiences of women--research <u>about</u> women--as well as "research <u>for</u> women" (Cook & Fonow, 1986, p. 80)--that is, research intended to empower women by facilitating understanding of their experiences and by promoting change in sexist institutional structures, practices, and cultures (Townsend, 1992; Twombley, 1991)).

<u>Data Sources</u>

Sources of data for this study were four-year women's colleges.

Criteria used to select the colleges to be studied included diversity of institutional missions, history, and selectivity; and quality of institutional leadership (as determined by interviews with experts in women's higher education (e.g., researchers, professional association officers, college presidents). Wellesley College (Massachusetts), Randolph-Macon Woman's College (Virginia), and Westhampton College (part of the coordinate system of the University of Richmond) agreed to participate in the study.

I visited each of the three colleges once, for four or five days, during the 1990-91 academic year. A second four-day visit was made to Wellesley in April, 1991 and a second five-day visit was conducted at Randolph-Macon in October, 1991. A second visit to Westhampton was not possible during the time of the study.

Respondents were identified by means of status and snowball sampling, sampling techniques that have been identified as appropriate for qualitative research (Whitt & Kuh, 1991); my goal was to achieve maximum variation in roles and perspectives among the respondents (Crowson, 1987). I interviewed 200 respondents at the three colleges (69 at Westhampton/University of Richmond, 58 at Randolph-Macon Woman's College, and 73 at Wellesley). This total included 98 students, 36 faculty members, 48 administrators, and 18 alumnae (seven of the administrators interviewed at Wellesley and Randolph-Macon and one of the faculty members at Randolph-Macon were alumnae of those colleges).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently in order to use existing data to inform collection and interpretation of additional data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data were obtained by means of individual and group interviews (with students, faculty, administrators, and alumnae), observations (such as of meetings of student groups, college ceremonies and rituals, classes), and document analysis (including information sent to prospective students, catalogs, planning documents, student newspapers).

Data analysis focused simultaneously on data within the individual sites and across sites. Data analysis was inductive, generating categories and themes from units of data (Whitt & Kuh, 1991). Case reports were developed for each institution after the first visit to each college. Final case reports were prepared with the help of feedback obtained in debriefings with respondents and additional data obtained during the second site visits. The case reports served as the basis for identifying factors and conditions common to all the participating institutions (Whitt & Kuh, 1991).

Establishing Trustworthiness

To establish the trustworthiness of the findings (i.e., were the findings of this study worth paying attention to? (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)), I used the criteria of credibility (the constructions arrived at are credible to the respondents), transferability (the study may be useful in another context), dependability (the reporting of results considers possible changes over time), and confirmability (the data

can be confirmed by someone other than the researcher) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, triangulation (i.e., multiple data sources and methods of data collection) and respondent debriefings were used to establish the credibility of the findings.

Results of the Study

Elsewhere I have described the three women's colleges in this study as educational environments that take women seriously (Whitt, 1992a; Whitt 1992b). One of the ways women were taken seriously was as leaders--leaders of the institutions and leaders within the student body. Results of the study of women students' leadership are described here in terms of the research questions identified above. A synopsis is provided for each and respondents' words are used extensively as illustrations. A discussion of implications of the results follows.

How Do Women Students Lead?

Students with whom I spoke described their leadership styles in terms similar to the "women's ways of leadership" identified earlier in the paper: "a consensus style of leadership in which everyone is valued equally" and "leaders make discussions inclusionary and organizations are not set up like pyramids." According to the students, this style of leadership "is fostered by faculty and administrators. They're not creating distances between leaders and followers." A student government officer stated,

> "women here are encouraged to be leaders for themselves as themselves; there aren't certain ways to be a good leader."

In fact, I came to think of many of the characteristics of so-

called "feminine" leadership as "the women's college way of doing business": egalitarian and horizontal structures, participatory governance, concern for individual circumstances, and alternative metaphors for organizing. The following statements are from faculty and administrators describing how their colleges work:

> "The philosophy here is that what each of us has to say is important and everyone in the community is involved in decision-making. So you get the sense that what you do matters."
>
> "[Our college] is a participatory democracy. Everybody has input and there is a lot of discussion and disagreement and committees. The Board is very collegial, like the administration and the faculty."
>
> "We consider ourselves to be a community, not an institution. We do not observe strict hierarchical lines; we put together the best minds for the problem at hand. We make decisions the way you would for a family. We care about people and use that as a frame of reference. And we have no organizational chart."

The chief executive officers of these colleges--all women--asserted their own leadership styles were participatory and consensual. The words of one of the presidents illustrate the approach all described:

> "You involve people because you learn from them and you make a better decision. [Our college] is a feast to which many people contribute, [which] is better than a feast sponsored by a single host . . . [I] make sure the process is one in which there is a lot of opportunity to be heard. It probably has to do with being a feminist; I appreciate the empowering virtues of a highly collective and highly egalitarian and level organization of true colleagues and equals."

How Do Women Students Learn to Lead?

Besides the role modeling of leadership just described, a number of leadership development activities were provided by the colleges.

These colleges were very intentional about the development of student leaders:

> "Our philosophy [is] educating students about themselves and discovering the potential that women have. [We tell students] 'some time in your life you'll probably be involved in leadership and so you'll need information about how women lead and what women can offer'" to leadership positions.
>
> "Ninety-nine percent of [student services'] work with students is planned to develop them as leaders and to make them aware of women's leadership issues"

Leadership development activities, such as workshops for organization officers and for women who had no experience as leaders, highlighted research and thinking about women's ways of leading (cf., Helgesen, 1990), encouraged collaborative leadership styles, and used works by female authors to inform students about leadership. For example, the "Emerging Leaders" workshop at Randolph-Macon is open to all first- and second-year students and meets four times each semester on topics such as theories of leadership, communication skills, women in the work force, and leadership skill development.

Another example of intentional leadership development is the Women Involved in Living and Learning (WILL) program at Westhampton College. The WILL program combines academic coursework, including classes in women's studies, career development, women in literature, women in law, and leadership, with cocurricular experiences, such as internships, community service projects, discussions with women professionals, and social events. Thirty students are selected to participate in WILL each spring, and the program continues throughout the student's time at the college. The WILL students constitute a

self-governing organization that ascribes to "a feminine model" (Micas, 1991, p. 12) of leadership ("[t]here are no constitution or by-laws. The agenda emanates from the members" (Micas, 1991, p. 12)), and that serves as a support group for its members. Students involved in WILL described the program as "a collective female community" in which "women are always heard," that "promotes a seriousness about learning about yourself," and that encourages supportive friendships among women.

Descriptions of Student Leadership Experiences

When asked about their leadership experiences, students focused on the responsibilities entailed by leadership roles and on the personal benefits of serving as leaders.

The students were given an extraordinary amount of responsibility for their lives and education, and had a significant role in the operation of their institutions. For example, students were voting members of most college committees, including long-range planning, curriculum and admissions committees, and administrative councils. Students chaired the faculty-student committees responsible for enforcing Honor Codes. Residence hall governments and student staff were "responsible for what happens in the dorms," including hall safety and community behavior, scheduling of reception desk coverage, and educational and social programming.

Students learned early that they have important roles to play at the college. One administrator commented,

> "From 'day one' students are told their voices are important and they're encouraged early on to take a leadership role. And the ways women are empowered here carries into their lives; they feel they have control over their lives, they feel they can make a difference in the world."

When asked what she learned at new student orientation, a first-year student at Randolph-Macon exclaimed, "find something you're interested in and be a leader!"

Students at all three colleges viewed these responsibilities as part of the larger college emphasis on service (e.g., Wellesley's motto means "not to be served, but to serve"). Taking leadership roles and contributing to the quality of life and education at the college were important ways of "giving back to a place that has given us so many opportunities," and, as such, were seen as obligations--important aspects of what it means to be a student at Randolph-Macon, Westhampton, or Wellesley.

Students recognized and valued the amount of responsibility they had.

> "[This college] encourages you to take charge. We're taken seriously--almost as seriously as the faculty. We voice our opinions and those opinions are taken into consideration."

> "In student government you learn you can really make a difference. It really gives you a feeling of power. If you want something to change, you can't wait for another student to step up."

The impact of leadership experiences on personal development also was apparent to the students. They associated involvement in leadership with enhanced social and political awareness; improved thinking, writing, communication, and organizational skills; and

expanded notions of possible majors and career choices. Perhaps most important, students attributed gains in self-confidence and a sense of self-efficacy to leadership.

> "Having positions of leadership in a women's community has helped me develop as a woman and has given me confidence in my leadership abilities. I think this will help me in my work with men. I see things I want to do, and do them."
>
> "I've gained a lot of self-confidence from being in leadership positions. I've done things I never thought I could do. I've become more outspoken. I have to talk and think on my feet, and make decisions and be available to other students."
>
> "Being [student government] president has made me more aware of what I'm capable of and more self-reliant. It's a real opportunity to learn who you are. And you can make mistakes and people [still] care about you."
>
> "Having responsibility gives you confidence, because people seek your opinion and because you get positive feedback."

Environmental Influences on Leadership Experiences and Development

The elements of the environments of these colleges that seemed to have the greatest impact on the development of students as leaders were (a) high expectations for student achievement, (b) models of female leaders, (c) extensive opportunities to become leaders and develop leadership skills, and (d) college missions focused on the education and development of women.

High expectations

These three women's colleges expected a lot of their students, including achievement, self-exploration and self-awareness, development of individual potential, involvement, commitment to service, and self-government. A faculty member said:

> "We push them. We encourage them to think about themselves as people who can make a difference in their world."

Because faculty and administrators communicate openly and often that student potential is unconstrained by traditional expectations or obstacles and that students are competent and capable, students begin to view themselves in that way, too.

> "People tell you on a pretty consistent basis that you can do anything you want to do; you feel confident."

> "You learn to risk because people expect it. People assume that you're perfectly capable, so you might as well do it. You never hear, 'I don't think you can do this.'"

> "Your decisions and choices are taken seriously. You get used to being listened to. They take us seriously from the start, so we take ourselves seriously . . . Once you have an inner strength--and that's what we get here--you have so much confidence that no one's ever going to take it from you."

> "Nobody sees you as having preconceived limitations. One of the strongest unspoken things happening in this school is that we're encouraged to believe that we can do anything--that we have unlimited potential."

According to students, the high expectations coupled with positive feedback encouraged them to run for student office, even if they had no leadership experience. They began to feel comfortable seeing themselves as leaders. One noted,

> "in high school, there are not many girls that want to be stars. Here you untrain yourself from wanting to be one of a crowd and not knowing what to say. Here it's ok to have attention drawn to you; you don't mind standing out."

Role Models

These colleges were committed to providing women students with models of what they could become, and of "what the world could be like if women were in positions of equality and shared leadership with

men." Role models sent a message to students that they, too, could aspire to leadership and achieve their aspirations. Therefore, role modeling of leadership was intentional and interactions with role models--faculty, administrators, students, and alumnae--were emphasized from the student's first contact with the college.

Student leaders were especially important role models for other students. The fact that every student leader at a women's college was a woman "inspires you to become a leader, because you're never told you can't do something." Other students commented:

> "Everything that's done here is done by students and all the leaders are women. It says 'you can do it, too.' When you see other women doing things that impress you, it kind of makes you feel you're important yourself."
>
> "Role models have a lot to do with what you get out of [this college]. You look at your peers and you think, with women like that as your leaders, 'maybe I can do it, too.' If all the leaders were men, I don't think I would think it was achievable."
>
> "Women are the norm here. One hundred percent of the student leaders are women. If things are going to get done, women will do them."
>
> "Students see women in leadership positions across the board [and] think, 'I can be anything.'"

Also, respondents emphasized the importance of having women on the faculty and in administration who serve as role models for leadership.

> "Dynamic female role models force people to see things--an awareness of what women face--and expand the image of what women can be."
>
> "Half the faculty are women; that's very unusual. A large number of women faculty and administrators provides different perceptions of who can be in charge."

> "We see role models--women and men--doing things we've only dreamed about, and no one even **suggests** we can't do it, too."

Opportunities for Leadership

The women's colleges in this study had

> "a tradition of expecting women to be leaders that pervades everything we do. At every event it's underscored, all the mottoes, our history--all stress leadership, leadership, leadership." More important, this commitment goes beyond words: "[we] talk about [women's] leadership and demonstrate it."

It goes almost without saying that opportunities for leadership at women's colleges are unlimited. An administrator made the obvious, but important, point:

> "Women do not just have equal opportunity here, they have every opportunity. Women have every opportunity to be leaders and every opportunity to make an impact."

For example, at Randolph-Macon Woman's College, more than half of the students in each graduating class have held elected or appointed leadership positions.

Students commented,

> "At this college, we can guarantee opportunities for leadership for women, and leadership skills are seen and encouraged."

Note the emphasis on identifying and encouraging student leadership potential. Many students stated that they had decided to pursue leadership opportunities because someone--a faculty member, a student affairs staff member, or another student--said,

> "'I think you can do this.' Her encouragement and support made me feel as though I **could** take on a leadership role."

Students also talked about opportunities for leadership when

they described what it was like to live and work in a women's community:

> "The opportunities when there are no men students around have changed the way I look at the world--like women in leadership roles all over campus."
>
> "My friends think I'm being sheltered, but I think this is a real opportunity to experience what it could be like if women were taken seriously as individuals."

The "absence of male competition" was an important factor in seeking leadership positions:

> "[In high school] if I ran for office against a guy and didn't get elected, maybe it was because I was a girl. He got votes from other guys and the girls that liked him. Here, if you fail, maybe you weren't good enough. But it's for reasons you can change."

Institutional Missions

The expectations and opportunities for students and leadership--indeed, all aspects of life and learning in women's colleges--were supported by, and reflected, the colleges' missions regarding the education of women. An administrator told me,

> "[i]t really does come down to having it be our central mission to be attentive to women's needs and women's capacities . . . everything we do takes its raison d'etre from that.

The mission of Wellesley College, for example, was "to provide an excellent liberal arts education for women who will make a difference in the world" (Wellesley College Self-Study Report, 1989, p. 19). A Wellesley alumna described this mission in her own words: "people here are really conscious of the core mission of the place--education of women for leadership."

Implications for Coeducational Institutions

The experiences of women student leaders at these women's colleges have a number of implications for facilitating the development of leadership for undergraduate women at coeducational institutions. Taken together, the results of this study imply the need for attention to (a) affirmative opportunities for women to develop and practice leadership skills, including in all-female settings, (b) leadership role models, (c) the context for the development of women as leaders, and (d) environmental assessment.

Affirmative Leadership Opportunities

Coeducational colleges and universities must create opportunities for women students to develop leadership skills and be leaders. One women's college administrator recommended that coeducational institutions

> "provide a sense of a place where women govern themselves . . . Develop a lot of organizations led by and participated in only by women . . . structures that have to be taken seriously. They empower women because it's women leading women and [they] think, 'I can do this, too.' . . . They need a way to get off by themselves. [Also], organizations run by women are more likely to attack issues of personal interest to women."

This recommendation is supported by other research on women's leadership (cf, Astin & Leland, 1991; Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Sagaria, 1988); recall that student respondents in Sagaria's (1988) study asserted that the most useful programs for women's leadership development were those designed for women. Similarly, King and Bauer (1988) asserted that the development of women students as leaders requires

> supportive communities . . . providing opportunities for friendship, for participation in the life of the campus, and for a feeling of progress and success in academic pursuits. (p. 83)

Although coeducational institutions cannot guarantee "100% of the leadership positions to women" as women's colleges can, steps can be taken to address obstacles to women's leadership development. Also, experiences of women's colleges and research such as that cited here suggest that all-female settings for developing and practicing leadership skills are good for women.

This call for special situations in which women can learn to be leaders should not be taken to mean that women are somehow deficient (Shavlik et al., 1989; Smith, 1989); rather, the playing field is not level. Having opportunities available for women to run for office in coeducational organizations--in essence, the "null environment" (Forrest et al., 1984, p. 13) described early in this paper--does not meet the needs of all women students for leadership development. Women may come to college without leadership experience, and/or without expectations that they can or will be college leaders. We know that many women students are likely to underestimate and undervalue their abilities and potential. Therefore, expecting large numbers of women to place themselves in the running for student organization leadership may be unrealistic. The experiences described by students in women's colleges highlight the impact of encouragement and affirmation--"I think you would be good at this"--on women seeking leadership opportunities.

The lack of women role models in student and institutional leadership positions may also encourage women to perceive that such positions are not available to them (Astin & Leland, 1991). Role models among faculty and administrators at coeducational institutions will be discussed in the following section.

Also, women students may be reluctant, for many reasons, to run for office against men; they may fear, perhaps, that, by seeking and/or holding leadership positions, they would alienate the men (Guido-DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988). In addition, the styles of leadership most comfortable and useful for many women, such as collaborative leadership or decision-making by consensus, may not be valued or reinforced by men (Guido DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988; Lyons, Saltonstall, & Hanmer, 1990; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988). This also may inhibit women's election to, or effectiveness in, leadership positions in coeducational organizations. What women need, then, are opportunities to develop and practice leadership skills in settings that affirm their experiences, challenge them to take risks, give them significant responsibility, and support them when they fail (Astin & Leland, 1991).

There was a time in American higher education--before the late 1960's and early 1970's--when coeducational institutions provided women with many opportunities to "get off by themselves" and gain leadership experiences in single-sex settings: women's residence halls, women's student government, women's recreation associations, women's honoraries, women's organizations within departments and

majors, and social and service sororities. These policies and practices were abandoned in most colleges and universities by the mid-1970's for a lot of very good reasons. Separate organizations and activities for women excluded them from important experiences, opportunities, and networks, and, in the minds of many, relegated women to second-class status in student, and community, life. Separate places for women implied that women needed to be protected, that they could not--and should not--compete on an equal basis with men. Treating women differently from men was believed to reinforce stereotypes about what women could and could not--should and should not--do (Jagger, 1990).

Also, different treatment for women, even the claim that women and men were different in ways that ought to be acknowledged, was perceived to imply that women were somehow inferior. Catherine Stimpson (1987) ascribed this perception to a "Western pattern . . . to organize human differences of both sex and race hierarchically [rather than] as if each element had equal weight and value" (p. 163); different must mean deficient.

After two decades of experience and research, however, we have evidence that treating male and female students as though they are the same, with identical needs for their time in college, is not educationally sound for either group, but may work to the special detriment of women (Harwood, 1990; Miller, 1986; Shavlik et al., 1989). Although "the idea of sameness is at the core of equality," (Jagger, 1990, p. 251), it is time to consider the possibility that a

commitment to sameness creates a "null environment" for some--if not many--women's learning and development. Indeed, "[a]ffirmations of similarity between women and men may inadvertantly universalize or validate norms of the dominant social group, norms that have been inattentive to women's interests, experiences, and perceptions" (Rhode, 1990, p. 4).

Now there are a lot of very good reasons to reconsider the merits of separate places for women students at coeducational colleges and universities, not as retreats, but as greenhouses--as places where women can be planted in fertile soil and nurtured to full growth. Jagger (1990) used the greenhouse metaphor in her description of ways to "transcend equality" to respond to differences between women and men and among women:

> [E]xperimentation with ways of transcending equality requires an enriched and in some ways protected environment, a consciously feminist community dedicated to discovering less rigid and hierarchical ways of living and thinking. We need not fear that such an environment will be so sheltered as to produce a weakened hothouse plant. Far from being sheltered from the cold winds of the larger world, alternative communities may be particularly vulnerable to them. It is stimulating, but hardly comfortable, to live daily with contradictons. (p. 254)

The contradictions inherent in finding ways to "get women off by themselves" at coeducational colleges and universities--indeed,

inherent in the daily lives of women in coeducational settings-- can, in fact, help to create developmentallly powerful learning environments for women. Women in coeducational settings "live" daily with men--in classrooms, in residences, in cocurricular activities--and confront, and learn from, each day the ways in which male-dominated institutions can contradict the experiences, needs, and histories of many women. Separate places for women's leadership development offer means to scrutinize these contradictions, affirm women's needs and experiences, and encourage social, institutional, and individual change.

If "nothing prepares for leadership like the experience of leading, knowing you can do it" (Keohane, 1984, p. 33) and if leadership experiences foster positive self-esteem for women students (Astin & Kent, 1983), we must make sure that women's leadership development is taken seriously, that leadership experiences are widely distributed among women students, and that such experience are viewed by women students as available and beneficial to them. Leadership programs such as the WILL program at Westhampton and the Emerging Leaders course at Randolph-Macon Woman's College are examples of affirmative opportunities for women's leadership development that could be transferable to coeducational settings. Social and service sororities, organizations for promoting women's concerns, women's residence halls, and major-related clubs for women students also offer means to "get women off by themselves"--in a positive sense--for leadership development.

Role Models

These colleges demonstrate that role models are an essential aspect of leadership development. When asked what coeducational institutions could learn from her college, a faculty member suggested that coeducational institutions

> "insure that women students get connected with women faculty and women administrators. [Provide] a system for women students to see what their lives can be like and to not feel as foreign as they might."

Other respondents noted, however, the challenges coeducational institutions face in insuring such connections and role models:

> "There's got to be a more deepseated worry about having women in intellectual and administrative authority . . . People find it really hard to see a woman in a position of power. That to me is the real stumbling block and, until that can change, I think anything else is only mildly interventionary."

> "You've got to get women in the classroom and women in administration and women at the top. If something's going to change, someone's got to orchestrate it."

The importance of role models for women's development in a variety of areas, including achievement in mathematics and science (Boli, Allen, & Payne, 1985); healthy identity formation (Komarovsky, 1985); pursuit of non-traditional fields of study, such as science and mathematics (Maple, 1992); as well as leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991; Keohane, 1984), is well documented. The necessity of women role models and mentors for women in coeducational institutions implies that there must be sufficient numbers of women faculty and administrators "to go around."

Of course, the addition of women to the faculty and administration will not, in and of itself, generate commitment to women students or create environments that take them seriously. But, as a women's college faculty member noted, "there's no substitute for numbers!" At this point in time, the "numbers" are not very good: at coeducational institutions, women constitute about 27% of full-time faculty (18% of the full professors, 38% of assistant professors) (in fact, women were a smaller percentage of tenured faculty in 1986 than in 1976), about 20% of board members (Chamberlain, 1988), and about 12% of college and university presidents (Blum, 1991).

Changes in the proportion of women, and women in leadership roles, in the faculties and administrations of coeducational institutions will help not only women students, but men students as well. A faculty member at a women's college exclaimed "<u>every</u> student should have experience in a place where the faculty is half men and half women!" In addition, the quality of work, governance, and community can only be improved by increasing access of women to areas in which they currently are underrepresented (Adelman, 1991).

<u>Institutional Context</u>

An essential element underlying all aspects of the learning environments--and leadership development--in the women's colleges in this study was the institutional mission: "we're devoted to the development of women. <u>They</u> are what we are doing." The high expectations, emphasis on role models, opportunities for leadership and leadership development, and the affirmation of women as leaders

described were the logical result and reflection of this focus on women's education.

Unlike women's colleges, a coeducational institution cannot focus its mission on women only, but it can be intentional and explicit about including women in that mission. This means naming women in the mission, considering what women students' needs are, and scrutinizing and improving the campus climate for women. Institutional leaders should not assume that an education (e.g., classroom environments, curricula, extracurricular opportunities) that is effective for men students is necessarily effective for women (Miller, 1986; Shavlik et al., 1989). To the contrary, to assume that "one size fits all" ensures that women students, as a group and individuals, will remain "outside the norm" (Wilkerson, 1989, p. 29) because women's needs and circumstances--to the extent that they differ from those of men--will not be central to the institution's educational priorities and purposes.

An institutional mission that includes, and fosters the development of, women, requires a pervasive institutional commitment to women, rather than assigning a single place, such as a Women's Center or an affirmative action office, or a special group, such as women faculty and administrators, responsibility for issues related to women. A women's college faculty member noted that "everybody's behavior is involved in creating a hospitable climate for women," a point that cannot be overemphasized.

Women's colleges also demonstrate that dissemination of research

about women's development and women's lives supports and reinforces a mission of women's education, including leadership. The body of research about women is growing and, if incorporated into planning and decision-making, as well as faculty and staff development, would focus institutional effort on policies and practices that support women's leadership development. For example, research on girls' experiences in school and the impact of those experiences on their self-esteem ought to inform orientation programs for women students. If women are likely to come to college underrating their intelligence and abilities, what messages and experiences do they need to fulfill their potential in college?

The importance of women in, and to, the institution must be demonstrated to both female and male prospective students. Institutional values are communicated to newcomers, whether intentionally or not, throughout the process of anticipatory socialization and orientation (Kuh et al., 1991). For example, a recent admissions publication of a large public university included only one picture of an undergraduate woman, and that was in a scene from a party at which she was surrounded by men (Iowa State University, 1991). Contrast the messages that may have conveyed with the messages communicated by the statement in Wellesley's viewbook that, at Wellesley, "you will be challenged to take risks, to do things you want to do rather than those you are expected to do . . ." (Wellesley in the World, 1990, p. 11) In each case, the institution made a statement to prospective students--and others--about roles,

experiences, and expectations of women on that campus.

Experiences of students in women's colleges confirm that high expectations for women students are an important aspect of educational environments that take women seriously. An administrator at a women's college asserted that coeducational institutions must

> "advance educational opportunities for women in a way that is truly equal and not at all tainted by some of the assumptions which one still hears [about] women being good at certain things and not at others . . . How much this must infect the self-confidence of potential students . . . [T]o foster a place where those things are absent is important."

Expectations are indeed powerful. A women's college faculty member asserted that the most important lesson coeducational institutions could learn from women's colleges is "the importance of challenging [women] students, of pushing them." The self-confidence expressed by students at these colleges was attributed to the positive challenges--coupled with support--that empower, rather than challenges posed by stereotypical expectations and other obstacles to leadership development.

In her essay, "Taking Women Students Seriously," Rich (1979) recommended that we "become harder on our women students" (p. 244) by maintaining high standards, urging risk-taking, not accepting passive learning, and affirming the importance and legitimacy of women's intellectual work. High expectations for women--and for women student leadership--must be communicated at every opportunity, in orientation, in academic advising, in career services, in residence halls, and in interactions between students and faculty. Given what we know about

women students' self-esteem, to say nothing--to take for granted that they know they are competent--is to confirm their worst fears about their capabilities; women need "to know that [they are] capable of intelligent thought and [they] need to know it right away" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 193).

Environmental Assessment

In order to know how to facilitate the development of women students as leaders at coeducational colleges and universities, we need to know and understand the current state of affairs for women's leadership and leadership development at our particular institutions. For example, what expectations for women students--including for leadership--are held and communicated? What opportunities for leadership are available, and to what extent do women avail themselves of those opportunities? If women do not take advantage of the opportunities, why not? What are women students' expectations and aspirations regarding leadership? What values, beliefs, and assumptions regarding women are expressed and demonstrated in the student cultures? What are the role models for women students, and what behaviors, attitudes, and values do they model? What is the institutional climate for women, not only women students, but faculty and staff? To what extent do women feel that they, and their education, are an integral aspect of the institutional mission? How are women treated by faculty, administrators, and male students? What are the implications of the views and treament of women students for the development of their leadership potential and for their learning?

Creating learning environments that support women's development, rather than "null environments," begins with self-knowledge and, so, self-assessment on each campus (Kuh et al, 1991).

Conclusion

Despite the potential benefits of programs, organizations and activities for women's leadership development, a number of obstacles exist to creating them, including concerns about burgeoning separatism and fragmentation within university communities, questions about how to balance women's needs for separate development with their needs--and desires--for participation in all of campus life, increasing funding limitations, and lack of commitment to reforming education for undergraduate women. Nevertheless, perhaps the most important lesson women's colleges can teach coeducational institutions is that, when given time, space, opportunities and encouragement within a women's community, in the words of a women's college faculty member, "women do it all and do it with a passion."

Colleges and universities must learn to "educate and create a climate that is involving for all [their] members" (Smith, 1989, p. 54) and effectively respond to the needs, expectations, and aspirations of individuals previously underrepresented in higher education. To do so, however, requires scrutiny of the basic assumptions and commitments of each institution (Kuh et al., 1991; Smith, 1989) and fundamental changes in institutional structures and processes (Moore, 1987); "it is no longer enough to make simple adjustments in our institutions to accommodate women" (Shavlik et al., 1989, p. 445).

It is relatively easy for women's colleges to accommodate women because their learning and development are why women's colleges exist. Going beyond "simple adjustments" to creating empowering environments for women within coeducational colleges and universities is a complicated and difficult task. Yet women's college missions, policies, practices, and cultures have much to teach coeducational institutions who are willing, and committed, to learn.

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